

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
AND CONSERVATION

2705 Spurgin Road, Missoula, MT 59804-3199
(406) 542-4300 Telefax (406) 542-4217



BRIAN SCHWEITZER
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MONTANA

DIRECTOR'S OFFICE (406) 444-2074
TELEFAX: (406) 444-2684

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Deputy Secretary Chuck Conners
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Washington, DC

RE: 2007 Farm Bill Comments

The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Forestry Division offers the following comments of support for the continuation of a Forestry Title within the 2007 Farm Bill and increased funding for forestry technical and financial assistance to family forest landowners.

Maintaining healthy sustainable forests, a functioning wood products industry and intact productive family forestlands is a growing concern nationwide. DNRC strongly supports a Forestry Title in the 2007 Farm Bill. We believe the pursuit of healthy sustainable forests should be incorporated as a National Priority. A separate Forestry Title in the Farm Bill will allow for recognition of forestry as a separate natural resource entity with specific forestry related issues and not be lost within the much larger Conservation Title. There are over 10 million family forest landowners whose lands provide many ecosystem services, such as clean water, wildlife habitat and recreation, as well as wood products. These lands and landowners are under the continual pressures of fragmentation and parcelization. These lands make significant contributions to our national economy.

Providing information/education, technical and financial assistance to private landowners is an important component of maintaining intact, healthy, sustainable forests and the associated ecosystem services. These are services government can and should make. Financial assistance to family forest landowners is an important component in addressing forestry issues and must be made available through the Farm Bill. Placing family forest landowner financial assistance within the Conservation Title makes good sense and can work very efficiently. Montana DNRC and the State Conservationist are currently engaged in a successful partnership to deliver technical and financial assistance to Montana's family forest landowners. In 2005 Montana NRCS provided \$3.4 million dollars in EQIP financial assistance to family forest landowners with DRNC providing part of the technical assistance. Approximately \$500,000 of the projects came from Forest Land Enhancement Program projects left unfunded when authority was withdrawn from that program.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment.

Robert Ethridge, Chief
Forestry Assistance Bureau
Montana DNRC
2705 Spurgin Road
Missoula MT 59804
406-542-4303
rethridge@mt.gov